



Lady Franklin's Revenge

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Born into a wealthy London family in late-eighteenth-century England, Jane Griffin enjoyed nothing like the opportunities available to men of her class. And yet she became a world traveller, ranging far off the beaten path of Grand-Tour Europe to explore Russia, Greece, the Holy Land and northern Africa. She rode a donkey into Nazareth, sailed a rat-infested boat up the Nile River, and, at age of seventy, circumnavigated the globe in rough sailing ships.

Jane married Captain John Franklin at thirty-six. She helped him seize the opportunity of a lifetime - leadership of a Royal Navy expedition destined, supposedly, to solve the final riddle of the Northwest Passage. After Franklin disappeared into the Arctic, she badgered the Admiralty into dispatching dozens of ships to locate him; she financed voyages through public subscription, paid for others out of her own pocket, and inspired even the president of the United States to contribute to the search.

In 1854, when explorer John Rae returned from the Arctic with news that the final survivors of the Franklin expedition, while starving to death, had degenerated into cannibalism, Jane enlisted the celebrated Charles Dickens to repudiate him. She then sent Leopold McClintock to the area Rae had specified, and he brought back the evidence she sought, exonerating Franklin personally and opening the way to her creation of a legend.

Lady Franklin's Revenge Details

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Susan says

Wow, what a gal! She was a true explorer of her time. Lots of chutzpah right up until the end. The biography explores her accomplishments and uses her diaries and letters to try to get at her motives, but since much of her own diary is self-censored, much is left to the imagination.

Ronald Kelland says

The story, nay I say legend, of the Franklin Expedition is one of the greatest mysteries of Canadian history. The disappearance of Sir John Franklin, his ships and crew while searching for the North West Passage in what would become the Canadian arctic has fascinated and intrigued scholars and dilettantes for more than a century. Lesser known is the role played by Lady Jane Franklin. She wasted no effort to find her husband and to solidify his place in exploration history, arguably creating the legend of Franklin that so fascinates us today. The results of Jane Franklin's quest resulted in numerous voyages to the north that would not otherwise have happened. While these voyages were largely unsuccessful in finding Franklin, they were responsible for the discovery and mapping of most of the arctic archipelago. McCoogan, who has made arctic exploration and the Franklin Expedition his life's work, tries to reveal to the world who Lady Jane Franklin was – a woman perhaps out of her time – a world traveller in a period where women were supposed to stay quietly at home, intelligent, opinionated, forceful and vengeful. She is equally inspirational and fascinating as she is frustrating and exasperating, but at the end of it all, she is clearly her own person. McCoogan's book is everything that a work of popular history should be. It is well researched and documented, yet it remains a page-turner. This is a book that should interest anyone interested in Canadian history, Franklin and the arctic as well as those interested in the social history of Victorian Age England. "Lady Franklin's Revenge" is a delightful read and an in depth examination of an interesting historical figure who has lived in the shadow of her famous husband for too long.

Rtrv2 says

A very good biography of an interesting character. It covers the Franklin expedition, but the ups and downs in the life of Jane Franklin are fascinating in their own right. From the wealth of primary sources, including her own diaries, she comes across as progressive but somewhat flawed, privileged and prone to temper tantrums.

Apart from all the material on Arctic exploration, the account of the Franklins' experiences in Tasmania is also very well-written and was totally new to me.

This is a very detailed and even-handed biography and I expect that it will stand the test of time. A very nice find!

Anna Pearce says

So far, I really like this book's tone and voice, but every time I open it up all I can think of is "Wow, this is such a Romance Novel title". (Friends think it's a murder mystery.)

However, it's a book about the exploration of the Arctic, and is about the life of Jane Franklin, wife of the man who "discovered" the Northwest Passage.

Barbara says

Being a Tasmanian who lives near the township of Franklin, who enjoys history & biography, and who had the pleasure & privilege of meeting the author following an address he delivered in Hobart, I was eager to read his books. Ken McGoogan is a great storyteller! I was not disappointed. Lady Jane Franklin was a quite formidable woman - adventurous, courageous, vulnerable, ambitious, tender, independent. I enjoyed discovering this woman who is something of an icon in this part of the world!!

Holly says

This was a really interesting book about a remarkable woman. Not a lot about the Franklin expedition beyond the searches for him - but truly a biography of his wife. If you're looking for expedition stuff this isn't the book for you.

Lady Jane is a complicated woman. I felt sorry for her as an ambitious, highly intelligent woman who was trapped by the time period in which she lived - relegated to a secondary role. But she knew how to work the system. She was undoubtedly the most well traveled European woman of her age. The over all impression I got of her was that she was not particularly likable and yet powerful people bent over backwards to do her bidding.

While her husband really didn't discover the North-west Passage her funding of numerous expeditions to find him did more for the mapping of Canada's north than her husband did in his two failed arctic expeditions.

Liz Leroux says

This book provides a fascinating look at the very determined and indomitable Lady Jane Franklin, wife of Sir John Franklin, Arctic explorer. While I thoroughly enjoyed reading about this spirited woman, the book gets bogged down in detail to the point that I rejoiced when I finally finished it!

Christine says

An excellent read...biography/history about a woman very ahead of her time!

Jo says

Engaging, authoritative, compelling - the fascinating story of an awe-inspiring woman who helped to shape an Arctic hero and then motivated world leaders to send one rescue mission after another to determine his fate. I thoroughly recommend it.

Loretta says

This got off to a slow start, but once Lady Jane and Sir John were in Van Diemen's land (Tasmania) I was captivated. And Lady Jane's extraordinary efforts to continue the search for Franklin, and then to dictate the way history would remember him, was truly fascinating. She was a woman who, born in 1968, would have been president of a huge successful company...or possibly Hilary Clinton. Instead, she was perceived as an uppity woman, and learned to work within the Victorian world through male surrogates carrying out her wishes. I found this a fascinating read, and also learned a lot about Arctic exploration and the stories of many familiar names (Rae, Beaufort, Stanley...)

Joanna Kafarowski says

Although she never visited the North, Lady Jane Franklin (1791-1875) remains a prominent figure in polar history. Following the disappearance of her husband Sir John Franklin and his two ships the HMS Erebus and Terror, Lady Franklin was instrumental in initiating and personally sponsoring many expeditions in an effort to discover what had happened to her husband. Devoting over twenty years to this cause, she used her formidable networking skills and influence to convince the British Admiralty to solve the mystery of the Franklin Expedition's fate. Ken McGoogan's absorbing biography captures the stifling societal constraints by which women of Lady Franklin's class and time were bound and aptly demonstrates the complex extraordinary nature of this unusual woman.

Rosemary says

A truly amazing Victorian woman - an explorer in her own right!

Sarah Harkness says

Although some of this book seemed to have been written for complete newcomers to history, I mostly enjoyed it - a fascinating story. And what an INCREDIBLE woman she was - fell out with all her family, including her father, but never gave up. and the travelling she did into her 70s is inspirational!

Wortumdrehung says

An awful title and even worse marketing for an interesting biography, covering both a history of arctic

discovery and a highly unconventional woman's life during most of the 19th century. Well written but full of details, getting somewhat tiresome during the latter part of the book.

Leigh says

Interesting. By reading about Franklin's expeditions to the Arctic and the search parties, I knew a little bit about Jane Franklin. I was most fascinated by her extensive world travels at a time when most British aristocrats thought going to continental Europe was a huge adventure. A thoughtful and balanced portrait of a very strong personality - McGoogan, I think, manages to present the facts in a neutral manner when it comes to the more unpleasant aspects of her biography.
